

The Cooperative Duties of School Officials and Teachers with the Health Officers.

ISSUED BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OF MAINE.

In the prevention and control of the infectious diseases there is a very great advantage in having a close and cordial cooperation of school officials and teachers on the one hand and of state and local health officials on the other. If one stitch in time saves nine, one prompt step by a teacher, for instance, in safeguarding the children under her care against the approach or the presence of a communicable disease, very often contributes in equal proportion to the welfare of her charges and of the community. Prompt and efficient action is also sure to prevent loss of school time and school money, losses which are too often very serious when that which should be done is not done quickly and efficiently. The presentation of the provisions of the health laws and the school laws and of the rules and regulations of the State Department of Health relating to cooperative action between school and health workers, and suggestions of such united activities, is the reason for this circular.

Circular 227, "The Characteristics of some of the Communicable Diseases," is kept in stock by the State Department of Health for the use of teachers, members of local boards of health and other local workers. Aside from circular 227, it would, very often, be a distinct help to the local superintendents of schools and to teachers in the larger schools particularly, if they kept on hand a copy of the "Rules and Regulations" relating to the infectious diseases.

Sections 58 and 59, Chapter 19 of the Revised Statutes, provides that teachers, school officers and local boards of health shall work together as follows:

Sec. 58. Children who have been exposed to contagion, shall be excluded from public schools. Whenever smallpox, diphtheria, scarlet fever or other contagious disease, shall appear in a town, the local board of health shall immediately notify the teachers of the public schools in the neighborhood of the fact, and all teachers and school officers when thus notified, or when otherwise they shall know or have good reason to believe that any such disease exists in any house in the neighborhood, shall exclude from the schoolhouse, all children and other persons living in such infected houses, or who have called or visited at such houses, until such time as the local board of health shall certify that such children or other persons may safely be readmitted.

Sec. 59. Schoolhouses, when infected, shall be closed. When persons from houses or places which are infected with any of the diseases for which disinfection may be required by the state board of health, have entered any schoolroom, or when, from any other cause, the schoolroom has probably become infected, the teacher shall dismiss the school and notify the school officers and local board of health, and no school shall be again held in such schoolroom until the room has been disinfected to the satisfaction of the local board of health, and the school officers and board of health shall cause the room to be disinfected as soon as possible.

The diseases in connection with which disinfection is required are: diphtheria, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis,) cerebro-spinal meningitis and smallpox. Rule 22, further provides that the disinfection shall be done in accordance with the directions for such work which may be given from time to time by the State Department of Health. Circular 220, "The Work of Disinfection," gives explicit directions.

In line with the statutory provisions relating to the cooperation of teachers, Rule 14 of the State Department of Health provides as follows:

"It shall be the duty of teachers and of principals of schools to note the condition or the symptoms of their pupils which are suggestive of the onset of a contagious or an infectious disease, and this particularly when a disease of this kind is prevalent or present in the community. Among the symptoms which should excite suspicion are those of a common cold or a cough when measles or whooping-cough are prevalent; tonsillitis or sore throat, which may mean diphtheria or scarlet fever:

or a rash at any time. The teacher or principal shall immediately report to the local health officer the condition of any pupil which is suggestive of a contagious or infectious disease and shall exclude such pupil from the school-room until he has been seen by the health officer or a physician. The teacher shall furthermore exclude from the schoolroom children from houses in which there is, or recently has been, a contagious or infectious disease until a certificate of readmission is received from the local health officer."

It will be noticed that the use of the word *shall* makes these provisions mandatory. The penalty provided in Section 65 of Chapter 19, is applicable alike to teachers and to local health officers who fail to do that which the law or the rules and regulations provide they shall do.

Under the school laws, Sections 43 and 44 of Chapter 16, are these important provisions for preventing the introduction of infectious diseases into the schools:

Sec. 43. Examination of pupils after absence on account of sickness. The superintending school committee shall cause to be referred to a school physician for examination and diagnosis every child returning to a school without a certificate from the board of health or family physician after absence on account of illness or whenever in the judgment of the teacher the circumstances of the absence were such as to require such a certificate, and every child in the schools under its jurisdiction who shows signs of being in ill health or of suffering from infectious or contagious diseases, unless he is at once excluded from school by the teacher; except that in case of schools in remote and isolated situations, the school committee may make such other arrangements as may best carry out the purposes of sections forty to forty-seven, both inclusive.

Sec. 44. Notice of disease or defects. The superintending school committee shall cause notice of disease or defects, if any, from which any child is found to be suffering, to be sent to his parents or guardians. Whenever a child shows symptoms of small-pox, scarlet fever, measles, chicken-pox, tuberculosis, diphtheria, or influenza, tonsilitis, whooping-cough, mumps, scabies, or trachoma, he shall be sent home immediately or as soon as safe and proper conveyance can be found, and the board of health and superintendent of schools shall at once be notified.